Li Shih-min, or, to give him the title by which he is best known, T'ai Tsung (or, to make clear his dynasty, T'ang Tai Tsung), was one of the ablest monarchs and had one of the most brilliant reigns in China's long history. Still only twenty-one years of age when his father ascended the throne (618), he contributed markedly to the latter's triumph, and, although he opened his own way to the succession by killing two of his brothers, he proved to be, for an autocrat, fairly magnanimous, frugal in his private life, usually affectionate to his family, and one who could attract and hold the loyalty of subordinates. During the nearly a quarter of a century of his reign (he died in 649) he succeeded in thoroughly unifying the country, in stimulating its culture and increasing its prosperity, and in placing it on a new pinnacle of power.

T'ang T'ai Tsung made no revolutionary innovations in administration. The districts inhabited by non-Chinese peoples were ruled through their own princes, who were given Chinese titles. For China proper, he and his father perpetuated most of the essential features of the governmental machinery of the Sui, as this dynasty, in turn, had received many of them from its predecessors, and these from the Han and the Ch'in. Over such of the Empire as was predominantly Chinese in population was a bureaucracy recruited largely—at least in theory—through civil service examinations. The Emperor could and did go outside the successful candidates at these examinations for some of his officials. Men who were reliably recommended to him as promising or whose ability he himself remarked, were appointed, even when they were not holders of literary degrees. The examination system helped

in part to break the power of the old aristocratic families, but these still had prestige, and, naturally, could give their scions educational privileges which were of advantage in preparation for the tests. T'ai Tsung retained the distinction between military and civil officials which we have remarked during the centuries of disunion.

Some modifications of detail were made. The Empire was redivided into ten *tao,* or provinces, and these in turn into *chou,* or prefectures—of which in 639 there were 358—and the *chow* into *hsien,* or sub-prefectures. In addition to members of the official hierarchy assigned to each of these divisions, there were imperial